

Last week I asked all of you to put yourself into the gospel reading and imagine you were along the Galilee seashore while Jesus called his first disciples. Well starting today and continuing for the next four Sundays I would like you to once again enter the gospel story and sit yourself down on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. This time you will be listening to the Lord as he preaches the most memorable sermon in history: the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon is recorded in chapters five, six, and seven of Matthew's gospel. The sermon opens with the verses known as the Beatitudes. When translated the word beatitude means blessed. Each of the nine verses that comprise the beatitudes describes what radical, lasting, meaningful happiness is all about. Unlike the temporary giddy feeling that stirs our hearts for an instant and then fades, this type of happiness has legs and is a lasting condition. Jesus' words to the crowds on the hillside suggests a way of life for followers and maps out just how believers can live in relationship to God and to others.

These beatitudes teach us how to live. They call us to be humble and meek; to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful and to be peacemakers who are clean of heart. As Jesus concludes the beatitudes he adds on praise for those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness and those who endure lies and insults because of their faith in God.

Just consider for a moment what these beatitudes ask of us as believers. Full of mercy is a good way to describe how we are to live together as followers of Christ. If we embrace mercy then we will be kind and respectful in our dealings with others especially the elderly and others who are physically and mentally challenged. We will not be tempted to bully others or make fun of people with disabilities. We will honor and respect our parents and care for our children. We will not let anger or impatience cloud our response to those who annoy us. When we live like this we will grow in humility and our hearts will be clean. We will become students of the Master and live up to the expectations that come with being a child of God.

Today in this Eucharist as we approach this sacred table we ask our Lord, who is meek and humble of heart, to give us the grace we need to comprehend the beatitudes and understand where these guideposts of our spiritual life will lead us in the days, months, and years ahead.